

Despite order, doubts remain about Red Hill

The EPA and Navy say Oahu's water will be safe, but some stress more must be done

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State and federal officials said Thursday that "immediate and long-term" actions being required of the Navy will help reduce the threat of future leaks at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.

But the head of the Honolulu Board of Water Supply, the Sierra Club of Hawai'i and at least one state senator say they continue to question whether enough is being done to ensure the safety of Oahu's water aquifer in a prompt fashion.

Details of the final Administrative Order on Consent, reached by the Navy, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Defense Logistics Agency and the state Department of Health, were made public by the agencies Thursday.

The settlement is in response to a January 2014 incident in which one of 20 Red Hill tanks leaked about 27,000 gallons of jet fuel oil, raising concerns that groundwater just below it may have been contaminated. Tests on drinking water samples taken since the incident have been largely within acceptable federal and state levels, but officials have voiced concerns about the use of the tanks.

"The tanks have already leaked, future leaks are foreseeable and there is no way to treat leaks before contamination reaches our water, so the only reasonable course of action is to retire the storage tanks."

Marti Townsend
Director, Sierra Club of Hawai'i

At a joint news conference Thursday, federal and state officials emphasized that the agreement would keep Oahu's water resources safe.

"Our top priority is protecting the public health and the environment in and around the Red Hill facility," said EPA Region IX public information officer Dean Higuchi. "Under the agreement, EPA and DOH will take the steps to ensure the Navy does the job right for the long-term protection of underground drinking sources once it has been determined what the right upgrades and technology are for the facility."

Among the stipulations agreed to, the Navy and Defense Logistics Agency must:

- » Install additional monitoring wells in the area as soon as possible "to address data gaps."
- » Comply with new federal underground storage tank regulations in an expedited manner.

- » Commit to installing the best available technology in the tanks as soon as “reasonably possible.”
- » Consider alternative fuel storage options or locations.
- » Provide more details regarding the scope of its tank inspection, repair and maintenance procedures.
- » Consult with experts from the Honolulu Board of Water Supply and the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.
- » Hold annual public update meetings.

‘Long timelines’

The Navy has received criticism from state and city officials, as well as the public, for foot-dragging in its response to the leak.

A draft administrative order released by the EPA and Health Department in June also was criticized for doing too little over too long a period of time. Specifically, it gave the Navy two years to evaluate the best options for upgrading the Red Hill tanks, and then 20 years to put the improvements in place.

Those timelines have not changed in the final agreement, Board of Water Supply Manager Ernest Lau told reporters Thursday.

“We are still concerned by the long timelines that are allowed,” Lau said. “The corrections to the tanks can take up to 22 years (under the agreement), and we hope they will take action much sooner than that.”

Lau said his agency continues to believe that creating a second lining around each of the tanks would be the best security measure. Studies done by the Navy in 2008 and 1998 concluded that either double-walling or development of a composite wall over the existing steel liner “seem to be the best solutions to reliably extend the life of this facility and to protect the environment.”

The Water Board has been trying to obtain records from the Navy, going so far as to submit a formal Freedom of Information Act request for documents that can better explain the nature of the leaks and the groundwater supply, Lau said. He said he is hoping the Navy turns over the documents soon for transparency reasons.

There is an urgency to make the improvements as soon as possible, he said. “Our concern is that because corrosion continues to occur on these tanks. ... Based on the Navy’s reports, they need to take actions in a much faster time frame.”

'Double-lining' urged

State Sen. Laura Thielen (D, Hawaii Kai-Waimanalo-Kailua), former director of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, also voiced dissatisfaction with the final agreement.

"It appears the state did not substantially alter the agreement with the Navy, which is extremely disappointing," Thielen said in a release.

"The Navy is not being held to upgrading the tanks to the best available technology, which is double-lining," she said. "Moreover, the Navy is still being allowed more than 20 years to upgrade the 70-plus-year-old tanks, which means we continue to place one of our largest drinking water sources for Honolulu at risk for contamination with deadly chemicals for the next two decades. "

Thielen criticized the administration of Gov. David Ige for ignoring public comments that expressed a need for more stringent remedies.

Marti Townsend, Sierra Club of Hawai'i director, also chastised the Ige administration for signing off on the agreement because it allows the Navy to "take unacceptable risks" with the island's water.

"The tanks have already leaked, future leaks are foreseeable and there is no way to treat leaks before contamination reaches our water, so the only reasonable course of action is to retire the storage tanks," Townsend said. The Navy and the industries that rely on the jet fuel oil reserves should find new locations for the tanks that meet today's environmental standards, she said.

She noted that the recently adopted rules for underground storage tanks require newly constructed ones to be double-lined.

Capt. Kenneth Epps, commanding officer of the Fleet Logistics Center at Pearl Harbor, said at the press conference that the agreement both protects Hawaii's drinking water and allows the Navy to plan for the future of the Red Hill storage facility.

He called Hawaii and the Red Hill storage facility both uniquely situated from a strategic standpoint, saying operations could continue even if electricity were cut off.

"It would be very tough to replicate that somewhere else, either at a different location or to rebuild it above ground," Epps said. "There are a number of advantages to being underground that we have now."

Costly upgrades

Calling the facility a unique and strategic resource, Epps said the government has spent \$145 million in upgrades since 2006 and estimated an additional \$70 million will be spent in the next five years "to further enhance the integrity of the tanks and the overall operational effectiveness of the facility."

Those dollar figures do not include what is being required in the agreement, he said.

Cmdr. Burr Vogel, operations officer for the Naval Facilities Engineering Command Hawaii, said the cost of the additional upgrades could range from “hundreds of millions up to a billion.”

A two-year study due in February will determine what best available practicable technology will be used for tank upgrades, Epps said.

Asked specifically about building second walls around the tanks, Epps said it is one option.

“We are looking at all options. ... There are some particular dynamics of a second wall which we need to further investigate to make sure that is the most feasible approach,” he said.

Regarding the timeline for fixes, Epps said with the size of the tanks, as well as where they’re located, “it’s just going to be very, very difficult to do that in a quick fashion.” Even a routine tank cleaning, inspection and repair of one of the tanks takes three years, he said.

“It is unlike any other fuel facility in the world,” he said. “You have 20 tanks in the mountain. It’s just going to take some time.”

Ige, in a statement, said the agreement will kick-start “long-overdue” action. “The state will be safer and better off with this agreement than it would be without it,” he said.

U.S. Sens. Brian Schatz and Mazie Hirono, in separate statements, applauded the agreement and said they would be vigilant in ensuring it is followed.

Hawaii, EPA and Navy Agree to Plan to Address Tank Leaks

By Audrey McAvoy, Associated Press

HONOLULU — Oct 1, 2015, 11:49 PM ET

The U.S. [[HYPERLINK "http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/environmental-protection-agency.htm"](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/environmental-protection-agency.htm)] and [[HYPERLINK "http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/hawaii.htm"](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/hawaii.htm)] [[HYPERLINK "http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/state-department.htm"](http://abcnews.go.com/topics/news/us/state-department.htm)] of Health on Thursday said they finalized a deal with the Navy to better prevent and detect leaks from 20 giant fuel storage tanks near Pearl Harbor.

The 70-year-old underground tanks are built into the side of a mountain atop a large aquifer critical to Honolulu's water supply. The tanks provide fuel to U.S. military ships and aircraft, serving as a strategically important "gas stop" between the U.S. West Coast and the western Pacific.

The agencies began working on plans to address leaks after the Navy detected a leak of 27,000 gallons of fuel from one tank last year. Samples from nearby water-monitoring wells showed a spike in hydrocarbons, indicating possible fuel contamination.

The agreement calls for studying options for upgrading the tanks and then fixing them over the next 20 years. Tanks not upgraded will be taken out of service. The upgrades are expected to cost tens of millions of dollars.

Capt. Ken Epps said the Navy was looking at all options for upgrading the tanks, including potentially building second walls around each tank to capture leaks.

The Navy will also study possibly moving the tanks somewhere else, but he said the current site at Red Hill has many advantages. One is that it's just 3 miles from Pearl Harbor.

The unique design of the facility means the tanks may supply fuel even amid a power outage. It's also off the grid, securing it from a cyber-attack, Epps said.

The agencies said the Navy will install additional monitoring wells as soon as possible in response to public feedback. Honolulu Board of Water Supply officials will provide technical advice as the plan is implemented. A tentative agreement announced in June generated 140 comments from the public.

The EPA and state said they will approve all work performed by the Navy. The Navy may be fined if the work isn't finished in accordance with the agreement.

The tanks, which are 250 feet tall and 100 feet in diameter, are the largest of their kind in the world. They were built in the 1940s.

State Sen. Laura Thielen, who represents Kailua and Waimanalo, said she was disappointed that Gov. David Ige's administration "ignored" comments from the public seeking stronger protections for the aquifer. She said the agreement doesn't require the Navy to double line the tanks, which is the best available technology.

"Moreover, the Navy is still being allowed more than 20 years to upgrade the 70-plus year old tanks, which means we continue to place one of our largest drinking water sources for Honolulu at risk for contamination with deadly chemicals for the next two decades," said Thielen.

Ige said in a statement the administration listened carefully to the concerns of stakeholders. He said the deal will increase transparency and was the best mechanism for holding the Navy accountable.

U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz of Hawaii said the deal was a pragmatic way forward but it's important to remain vigilant.

"I will continue to work with the Navy to ensure it has the resources it needs to continuously monitor and upgrade the facility so that it can continue to safely operate this strategic fuel depot in the Asia Pacific," the Democrat said in a statement.

Ernest Lau, the Honolulu Board of Water Supply's chief engineer, said his organization is concerned because the agreement gives the Navy up to 22 years to complete repairs or upgrades.

The board had pushed for a shorter timeline. **Lau said in a statement his agency would work with the other agencies as they moved forward with the agreement.**

Settlement reached over Red Hill fuel spill

Navy, EPA, State outline steps to minimize the threat to Honolulu's drinking water

<http://www.kitv.com/news/settlement-reached-over-red-hill-fuel-spill/35611510>

UPDATED 7:18 PM HST Oct 01, 2015 Catherine Cruz KITV NEWS

HONOLULU —It took a spill of an estimated 27,000 gallons to draw attention to serious environmental risks that aging fuel tanks pose to Honolulu's drinking water.

Two years after that spill, there was still no cleanup, but the military agreed to a timeline and scope of work to reduce the threat. The plan gives a 20-year time frame to upgrade the 20 underground tanks.

"If we find that technology is appropriate and feasible as far as economics, that time frame could be shortened quite a bit," said Keith Kawaoka, Deputy Environmental Director.

The settlement doesn't promise double-lined tanks nor does it say exactly how many additional monitoring wells will go in, but it does address studies that need to be done in the next two years to meet the 20-year timeline.

"One other thing that makes this unique is we have a regulatory agencies overseeing the Navy on a situation where wouldn't have been," said Dean Higuchi, EPA Region Hawaii.

The settlement also has language that leaves open improvements to leak detection systems and cleanup of past spills.

Navy officials say the spills can't be pumped, put out or dug out. The only other option? Finding ways to speed up the degrading process.

While the settlement says the military agrees to look at alternate fuel storage options and other locations, Navy officials were clear that moving the tanks isn't really doable.

The military points to the strategic importance of the facility to fueling the Pacific fleet's ships and planes, and being built into a mountainside provides the protections from outside threats and any power failure.

"Because of our off-the-grid nature, we are particularly not prone to any kind of cyberattacks. The combination of those elements make Red Hill unique and difficult to replicate in 2015 and up," said Capt. Kenneth Epps, Fleet Logistics Center.

However, some still worry that the settlement doesn't go far enough to address the corrosion of the tanks and the transparency of a process that is up against national security.

"Actions need to be taken in a quicker time frame. This is a really old facility," said Ernie Lau, Board of Water Supply Chief Engineer.

An old facility that even the military acknowledges the need for improvements that could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars even upwards of a billion dollars.

To view the full document on the Red Hill plans, please visit the "As Seen On" section of KITV.com.

Navy, EPA agree to settlement over fuel oil spill (EARLY STORY)

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The Navy needs to take "immediate and long-term" actions to ease the threat of future leaks at its Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, according to a final settlement it negotiated with the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Health made public today.

Under the Administrative Order on Consent, the Navy and the Defense Logistics Agency will be upgrading or taking out of service each of the 20 underground storage tanks at Red Hill as quickly as possible, which the EPA estimated will run in the tens of millions of dollars.

In January 2014, one of 20 Red Hill tanks leaked about 27,000 gallons of jet fuel oil, raising concerns that groundwater below it may have been contaminated. Tests on drinking water samples taken since the incident have been largely within acceptable federal and state officials, but state and city officials have voiced concerns about continued use of the tanks.

The Navy, meanwhile, has received criticism from state and city officials, as well as the public, for foot-dragging in its response to the leak.

Among the other stipulations agreed to, the Navy and Defense Logistics Agency must:

- Install additional monitoring wells in the area as soon as possible "to address data gaps."
- Comply with new federal Underground Storage Tank regulations in an expedited manner.
- Commit to installing Best Available Practicable Technology in the Red Hill tanks as soon as "reasonably possible."

— Consider alternative fuel storage options or locations.

— Provide more details regarding the scope of its tank inspection, repair and maintenance procedures.

— Consult with subject matter experts from the Honolulu Board of Water Supply and the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

“EPA listened to the public, and the result is a strengthened agreement,” said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA Pacific Southwest Regional administrator. “Now the work can start, and we look forward to collaborating with DOH and local stakeholders on this long-term effort to protect public health and Hawaii’s precious aquifers.”

A draft administrative order released by the EPA and Health Department in June also was criticized for doing too little over too long a period of time. The final order came after public comment period during which more than 140 comments were received, the EPA said.